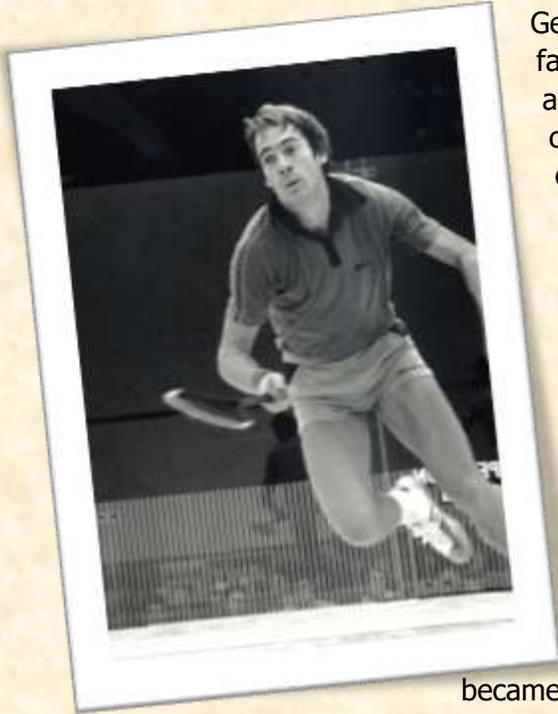


## GEOFF HUNT – a 'greatest ever'



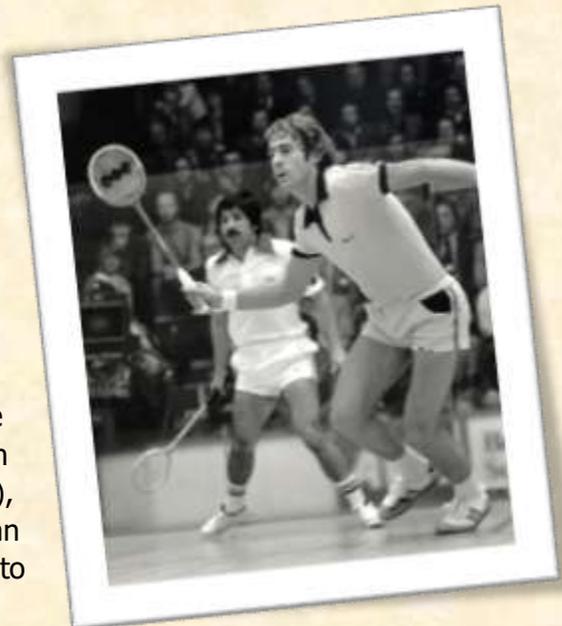
Geoffrey Brian ("Geoff") Hunt was born into a squash family, in Melbourne, Australia, on March 11, 1947. Indeed, an early harbinger of his greatness was when, at the age of 15, he clinched the state of Victoria's men's championship by overcoming his closest rival in a very hard-fought five-game final. His rival? His older brother Bill.

His father Vic and mother Connie were both fitness aficionados who took up squash when they were in search of a sport that would increase their physical activity. Soon the father had introduced both his son Bill and daughter Patricia to the sport, and they all enjoyed success at it. Vic went on to win several Victorian state and Australian senior veteran's titles, and Bill achieved the men's number one ranking in Victoria and was ranked as high as eight in Australia. Patricia, Geoff Hunt's younger sister, also

became the women's top-ranked player in Victoria, competing in state, regional and national tournaments around Australia.

With that family background, it might be said that Hunt was destined to be a very good squash player. But he became one of the *greatest ever* in the sport, showing an inner drive and grit that became legendary and led to his many on-court successes. While off the court his quiet manner, limelight avoidance and professional manner made him a real role model for the pros following in his wake.

His accomplishments are stellar, and include being ranked world #1 from 1975 to 1980. He won the first three biennial International Amateur Individual Championships, in 1967, 1969, and 1971, and the British Open eight times, between 1969 and 1981. In those finals he beat Cam Nancarrow (twice), Mohammed Yasin, Mohibullah Khan, Qamar Zaman (three times), and Jahangir Khan. He was runner-up to Jonah Barrington in 1970 and 1972.

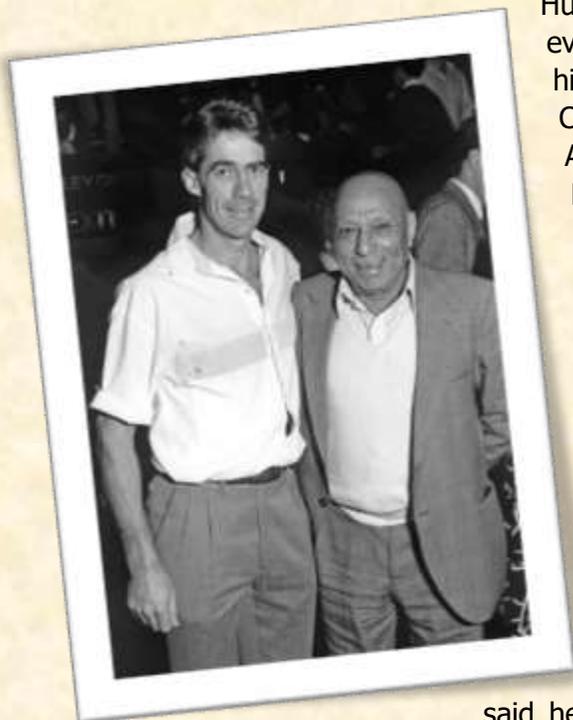


In addition he won the inaugural World Open in 1976, beating Mohibullah Khan, and won again in 1977, 1979 and 1980, beating Qamar Zaman (*left*) each time.

In his later years after he had managed to hold the group of Pakistani stars and Jonah Barrington at bay in a period of superb rivalry, he eventually had to concede the World Open title to emerging Jahangir Khan in November 1981. Although he returned to Europe the following season, a damaged vertebra forced him to call time on his career.

His style of play frustrated opponents by his tightness and control, tactical astuteness featuring changes of pace, and resilience that was renowned.

### ***A Founder of the Professional Game***



Hunt challenged himself by playing in men's tournaments even while still a junior, which is how he came to meet his brother in the finals of that Australian Amateur Men's Championship (in 1965). Earlier, in 1963, he had won the Australian Junior Championship. By age 16 he toured England with the Australian senior team, which was led by seven-time Australian Open champion Ken Hiscoe—who in short order would also fall victim to Hunt's precocious athletic ability.

Hunt's first coach was his father, whom he credits with supporting him throughout his career. He also mentions Ken Hiscoe, who was a mentor and also a close friend, and another early coach, Bryan Boys.

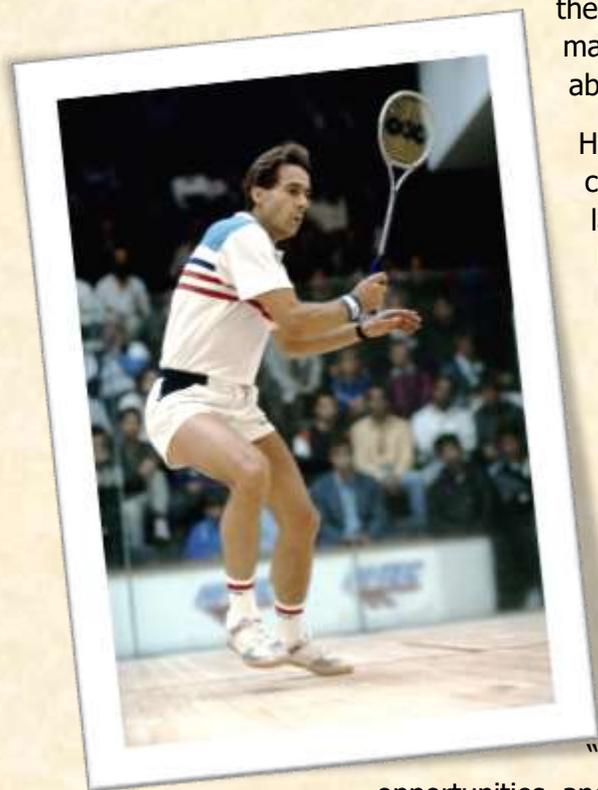
*(Hunt with fellow legend Hashim Khan, left)*

Hunt was a determined and supremely fit fighter.

At one time he practiced every day of the year, Christmas included, to keep on top of the game. Hunt said he took every game seriously, but not to the point of sacrificing his principles. "Wins should be achieved by playing fair and square. Even though I would try as hard as possible every match, and despite what my opponents might do, it was against my principles to cheat by doing things like picking up double bounces or playing on after hitting the ball twice. Squash, to me, is a game of integrity and self-respect."

Hunt knew that to embark on a professional career, which he did at age 24, he would have to become even more committed. Initially, Hunt formed a partnership with Hiscoe, playing exhibition matches and conducted coaching clinics globally. After a few years on the road, he formed a strategic alliance with six-time British Open winner Jonah Barrington. They convinced a handful of other newcomers to the professional world to form the first governing body for men's professional squash, the International Squash Professionals Association (ISPA) in 1974. This early group was comprised of only twelve members.

ISPA revolutionized professional squash through its inaugural World Open tournament, in 1976, which was played in London and was an amalgamation of the World Open Squash Tournament and the British Open. This event was initially hosted by the British Squash Rackets Association (SRA), now England Squash. ISPA and SRA then agreed that it would be more advantageous for



the sport if the British Open and the World Open were managed as two separate events. A year later, ISPA was able to attract a then staggering US\$50,000 in sponsorship.

Hunt, of course, would go on to be one of the most commanding players in the sport's history, and has been lauded with various awards, including being made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) and a Member of the Order of Australia (AM), receiving the Australian Sports Medal, and being inducted into the World Squash Federation's Hall of Fame and the Sport Australia Hall of Fame.

### ***Thoughts on the Sport Today***

Unfortunately, Hunt's illustrious squash career succumbed to a back injury, forcing his retirement. Hunt had been careful to develop credentials in the non-sporting world, attending Monash University and earning a BSc in chemistry and getting a graduate diploma in human nutrition from Deakin University.

"It is imperative that athletes seek out higher learning opportunities, and more so if you are a professional athlete. One has to be prepared for life after squash, as even the best-laid plans fail. Once you have a solid educational background, if you become injured or if things don't work out on tour, you have a contingency plan to fall back on."

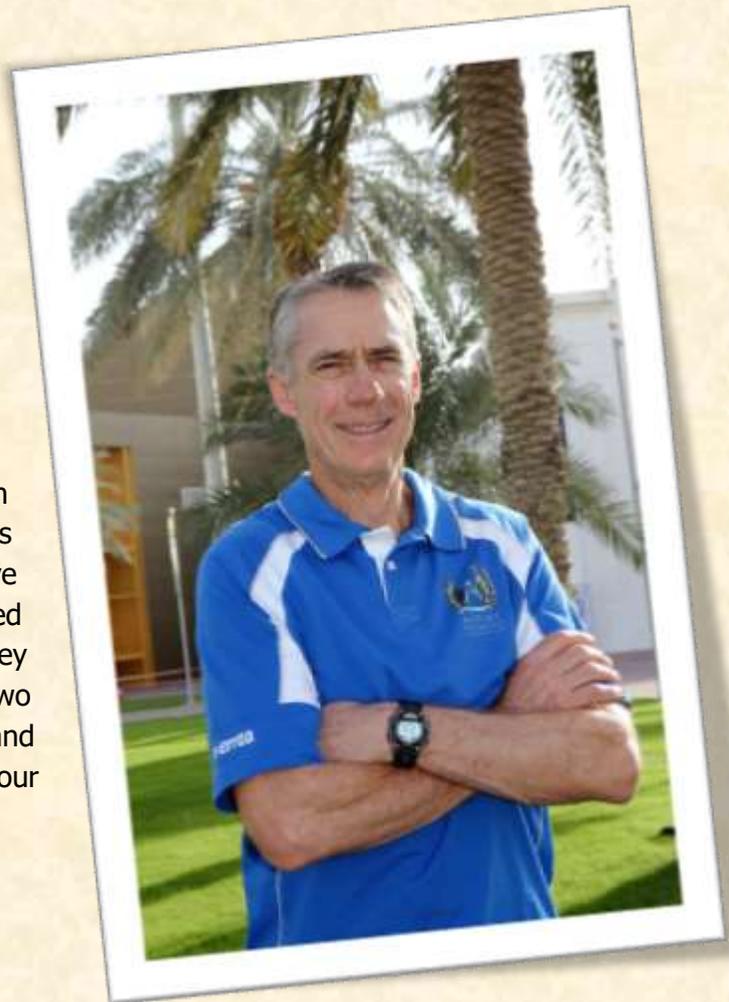
Hunt also was certified as a Level 3 squash coach and level 2 strength and conditioning coach, which allowed him to remain active in the sport he loves. Hunt coached players at the Australian Institute of Sport and considers himself fortunate to be still coaching elite junior and senior players. He also spent 8 years in Qatar at the Aspire Academy and is currently coaching Abdullah Al-Tamimi, a pro player.

He may be over seventy now, but is as trim as in his playing days; and when on court with Al-Tamimi the man looks the same, only the rackets have changed!

Hunt's advice for today's pros? "You must ensure that you are physically fit to allow for longevity in the game. Every individual is different, but a high level of strength, speed and endurance are critical. However, flexibility and stability are also essential! Players must hone all these skills, and look for opportunities to develop and foster their core competencies in the game, on and off the court. On the court, the player needs to be able to control the ball and develop proper positioning for the execution of strategic shots."

Hunt is unequivocal in his desire to see squash included in the Olympic Games. "Squash is a beautiful game and possesses all the qualities of a true sport and should be included on this magnificent stage. Inclusion at this level would surely profile the game and attract more sponsors globally--and with time, the sport will grow and develop to the level of larger Olympic sports." One way to grow the game, Hunt said, is to always push for more people to see the sport, try it out, and then get playing.

Hunt now lives on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, and is married to his wife Irene. Irene also was a competitive local squash player, but alas she too suffered a back injury that curtailed her playing. They have a son, Wesley, and Hunt has two children from his first marriage, Ben and Sarah. He also is the proud grandfather of four grandkids.



*Interview by Diane Julien, July 2019*

*Photos courtesy of Steve Line*

### **CAREER HIGHLIGHTS**

- A dominant force in World Squash in the 1970's through to the early 1980s.
- Won 178 of 215 events he entered.
- 3 World Amateur Individual titles (1967, 69, 71)
- 4 World Open titles, including the first one played in 1976 (1976, 77, 79, 80)
- 8 British Open titles (1969, 74, 76 – 81)
- Number one in the World Rankings for 59 months (1976 – 1980)
- Led Australia to World Team titles in 1969 & 1971